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Modern Christian Literature in Sanskrit

Prof. Satya Vrat Shastri

When the Christian missionaries descended on India in the last century they found Sanskrit still the medium of higher thought and culture. People of upper castes who mattered most used it widely. The missionaries of the time thought that if they were to make any impact on Indian society, they would have to learn the language of higher castes and render their writings in it to be accessible to them. Once the Brahmins or others who had the upper hand in society were drawn to Christianity, it would be easier for them, the missionaries, to spread the message of Christ among the common people who would feel attracted towards it, having found their superiors taking to it. With this idea in view they took to the study of Sanskrit, wrote its grammars, compiled its dictionaries, prepared its text books. With all this equipment they took to the translation of the Bible into Sanskrit, the Old and the New Testaments, the Sermon on the Mount, and so on. They also composed many an original work in Sanskrit, in verse and prose, on Lord Christ. The result : A whole class of Christian literature in Sanskrit grew over a period of time. It would be worth its while to have a close look at it. And this is what is precisely attempted in the pages to follow.

The activity in the field of the translation of the Bible into Sanskrit began as early as 1808. The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was translated into Sanskrit from the original Greek by the missionaries at Serampore under the superintendence of William Carey in three volumes, the third volume making its appearance in 1811, three years after the publication of the first. This was followed by the Sanskrit translation of the Old and the New Testaments, again from Serampore in 1821. In 1845 the Baptist Mission

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Press, Calcutta published the *Book of the Prophet Isaiah* in Sanskrit. In 1860 appeared the *Bible for the Pandits* with the first three chapters of *Genesis* 'diffusively and unreservedly' commented in Sanskrit and English by J.R. Ballantyne from London. The translations started in the nineteenth century continued in the twentieth century as well. The Bible Society of India brought out the latest reprint of the *New Testament* in Sanskrit : *Prabhuṇā Yisukhrisṭena Nirūpitasya Niyamasya Granthasamigrahaḥ* as late as in 1962. Attempts were made alongside translating the *Old and the New Testaments*, certain portions thereof. The Calcutta Baptist Missionaries brought out from Calcutta in 1843 the translation from Hebrew into Sanskrit of the *Book of Genesis* and the part of *Exodus*. Two collections of the *Proverbs* of Solomon in Sanskrit appeared from the School Book Society's Press, Calcutta and The Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta in 1842 and 1846 respectively.

The Baptist Mission Press in Calcutta has been very active in bringing out Christian literature in Sanskrit translation. It brought out the collection of the Gospels of four Christian saints in a single volume : *Khrṣṭa caritam : Arthato (?) Mathi-Marka-Luka-Yohanair Viracitam Susamivāda-catustayam* in 1878. It also brought out separate volumes on the Gospels of Mathi, Mark and Luk. The one on Mathi under the title *Māthilikhitah Susamivādah* appeared in 1877 and the ones on Mark under the title *Mārkalikhitah Susamivādah* and *Satyadharmaśāstram : Mārkalikhitah Susamivādah* : *Arthato (?) Prabhor Yisukhrṣṭīya-caritra-darpaṇam* appeared in 1878 and 1884 respectively. The Gospel of Luk came out under the title *Lūkalikhitah Susamivādah* in 1878. The Gospel of St. John came out in Sanskrit under the title : *Yohana-likhitah Susamivādah* not from the Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta but from the Basel Mission Press, Mangalore in 1876.

Of the portions of the *Bible* it is the Sermon on the Mount that has attracted good notice of the Sanskritists. There are at least three independent translations of it into Sanskrit by Lachmi Dhar Shastri published by him from Delhi in 1928. One, two from

the Bible Society of India, Bangalore, by K.P. Urumese from Trichur, the last two published in 1974. The *Sermon* also appears in a succinct form in every creative work on Christ in Sanskrit. A very interesting work in the field of translation is the *Khrīstayajñavidhiḥ*. The work is a translation in Sanskrit of the *Ordo Missae* in Latin by Ambrose Sureschandra Roy and was published from Calcutta in 1926. Apart from translations there has been a lot of original composition on Christianity in Sanskrit both in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. About half a dozen smaller works like the *Īśvaroktaśāstradhārā* (The course of Divine Revelation) by John Muir, the *Parama-stava*, a hymn in verse on God, *Paulacarita*, a short life of apostle Paul in verse, the *Khrīstasaṅgīta*, the history of Jesus Christ in verse, the same *Khrīṣṭadharmakaumudī* by J.R. Ballantyne, which is a comparison of Christianity with Hindu Philosophy, in prose and a critical review of *Khrīṣṭadhar makāumudīśa mālocana* in prose again by Brajalal Mukhopadhyaya. *Kṛtyaśi, Poema, large and*

The twentieth century too has seen many an original publication on Christ and Christianity, the latest and the biggest of which is the *Kristubhāgavatam*, a Mahākāvya in Sanskrit in thirty three cantos with a thousand and six hundred stanzas on the life of Lord Christ by P.C. Devassia which won him in 1980 the coveted Sahitya Akademi award in Sanskrit. The thirty three cantos of the Kāvya correspond to the number of the years of the Lord's life. Although in narrating the story of the Lord the author relies on the versions of the Gospels and some reputed biographies of Christ and is faithful to incidents as recorded there, yet he shows his freedom and imagination as a poet to introduce poetic elements which however do not dilute the authenticity of the narrative. The poem is simple and straightforward, composed in the much-valued Vaidarbhī style.

The Mahākāvya, the greatest so far, on Lord Christ in Sanskrit has, as the author himself points out in the Preface, many allusions to and illustrations from the Hindu Purāṇas and Epics. This the author ascribes to his growth in an atmosphere of Sanskrit literature

which could not but appear even in a work on Christ. Another great influence on the author in this was His Eminence Joseph Cardinal Parecattil, the Archbishop of Ernakulam who, he says, believes that the Church in India must have its roots in the culture and the tradition of the land. A Sanskrit scholar, he has played an important role in the Indianization of the Church.

The stanzas in the Mahākāvya have a flow of their own which cannot but charm a reader. A stanza or two from canto XVII dealing with the *Sermon on the Mount* could well be reproduced here by way of specimen :

bhikṣā tvayā dakṣiṇahastadattā भिक्षा त्वया दक्षिणहस्तदत्ता
na jñāyatām vāmakareṇa te sā । न ज्ञायतां वामकरेण ते सा ।
dānasya caivam nibhṛtaṁ kṛtasya दानस्यैव निभृतं कृतस्य
pitā phalaṁ dāsyati guptadarśi ॥¹ पिता फलं दास्यति गुप्तदर्शी ॥

"When you give alms, do not let the left hand know what your right hand has done. For the alms-giving thus done in secret, your Father who sees in secret shall reward you."

yūyam mā sañcinuta nidhim ātmārtham urvyām hi yasmāt ययम् मा साञ्चिनुत निधिम आत्मार्थम् उर्व्याम् हि यस्मात्
klādyaś tam kṣayam upanayanty atra muṣṇanti caurāḥ । क्लद्याशं तम क्षयम् उपनयन्त्य अत्र मुष्णन्ति चौराः ।
svarge tām sañcinuta vibhavān ye hi tair na hriyante स्वर्गे ताम साञ्चिनुत विभवान् ये हि तैर् न ह्रियन्ते
vittam yasmin bhavati bhuvane tatra cittam ca vaḥ syāt ॥² वित्तम् यस्मिन् भवति भुवने तत्र चित्तम् च वा ष्यत् ॥

"Do not lay up for yourself treasures on earth, where moths and other insects consume them, and where thieves break in and steal them; but lay up those treasures in heaven where they are not consumed by them, for, where your treasure is, in that world will your heart also be."

Of the smaller Kāvya on Lord Christ could be mentioned *Sree Yesusourabham* by Soma Varma Raja which has 67, 70, 78, and 86 stanzas in its first, second, third and fourth cantos respectively. The Kāvya closes with five hymns of which the first is a prayer, a string of seven stanzas called the *Bhajanasaptakam*, the second, a hymn to the Sacred Heart, the third, the praise of Christ, the fourth, the hymn to Christ and the fifth, the *Bhaktajīviṣā*, an expression of the

desire of the devotee to see the Master and to live according to his tenets. In its 301 stanzas in mellifluous Sanskrit the author sums up the whole story of the *Bible*. Though following the Biblical narrative faithfully, he takes reasonable licence in versification. The reactions of the multitude gathered at the foot of the Cross, Christ's enemies, his devotees, the sorrowful women and the good men and their addresses to the crucified are all presented in the present work with deftness. Both the genius and the originality of the author are reflected in this part and the words of the spectators on Calvary sink deep into the heart:

Kruṣa paramaviśālo 'py ugrarūpam tvadīyam क्रुषा परमविशालोऽप्युग्ररूपम् त्वदीयम्
manasi kalayato bhīḥ pāpinaḥ kasya na syāt । मनसि कलयतो भूयः पापिनाः कस्य न श्येत् ।
tvam asi kaṭhinapīḍābhogaparyāyavācī त्वमसि कठिनपीड्याभोगपर्यायवाची
nikhilajananiṣevyo divyasaṅgena jātah ॥³ निखिलजाननिषेव्यो दिव्यसाङ्गेना ज्ञातः ॥

"O wide cross ! Who will not be frightened to see or think about you. You have become another word for grave pain. But now you are a thing of worship, for you have carried our Lord on you."

In the lamentation of Mary, the Mother of Lord Christ, a note of intense sorrow is struck. The words therein betray in full the motherly pangs. It looks while writing about this the poet had at the back of his mind the description of the lamentation of Rati in the *Kumārasambhava* and that of Aja in the *Raghuvamśa* of Kālidāsa. Not only is the whole setting the same, even the metre is so:

gatasamjñam avekṣya vihvaṭā गतसंज्ञम् अवेक्ष्य विह्वला
Mariyā svāṅkagatam nijātmajam । मरिया स्वङ्कगतम् निजआत्मजम् ।
vilaṭā sabāṣpalocanā विलाटा सबाषपालोचना
samaduḥkhān akhilānś ca kurvatī ॥⁴ समदुःखान् अखिलान्श्च कुरुवती ॥

"Mary saw the lifeless body of her son on her lap. She was overcome with grief. She cried shedding tears, making all present there equally sorry."

The expression *vilaṭā sabāṣpalocanā* cannot but remind one of the *Raghuvamśa*'s *vilaṭā sabāṣpagad-gaḍam*⁵ and *samaduḥkhān akhilānś ca kurvatī* of the *Kumāra-sambhava*'s *vilaṭā vikīrṇamūrdhajā*

samaduḥkhām iva kurvatī sthālīm. So do the lines
kr̥paṇo mama daighyam āyusaḥ. kaṭhinaḥ khalv iha
*dattavān v idhiḥ*⁶ of Kumārasambhava's *na vidīrye*
*kaṭhināḥ khalu striyaḥ*⁷

Kālidāsa's influence on the author is also noticeable in the stanza in the beginning of his work :

kva me nirviṣayā buddhiḥ क्व मे निर्विषय बुद्धिः
kva śrīyeṣumahākathā क्व श्रीयेषु महाकाथाः
mohād bhavāmyāruruksur मोहाद्भवाम्यारुरुक्षुः
amayāvi mahāgirim II⁸ अमयावी महागिरिम्

"Where is the intellect devoid of the knowledge of the subject matter and where is the great magnificent story of Jesus. It is an attempt, like that of a sick man trying to climb a high mountain."

This clearly is inspired by the well-known Raghuvamśa verse:

kva sūryaprabhavo varṁśaḥ
kva cālpaviṣayaḥ matiḥ I
tīrṣur dustaram mohād
udupenāsmi sāgaram II⁹

"Where is the race sprung from the sun and where is my intellect of limited scope. It is under a delusion that I am desirous of crossing, by means of a raft, the ocean so difficult to cross."

A spirit of the divine and a sense of devotion pervade the whole of the *Sreeyesusourabham* which is indeed a happy blend of simplicity and profundity. It reflects the glorious and the heavenly personality of Lord Christ in a most impressive manner and amply reveals the poet in the author whose *Khaṇḍakāvya*—it is to this category that his work belongs according to rhetoricians—makes a very pleasant reading. There are Similes, Metaphors and Fancies here which do tickle the Sahṛdaya, the connoisseur and add further charm to the work.

The author is in the habit of twisting some of the foreign words to give them a different look, not necessarily Sanskritic, to make them fit into Sanskrit diction.

Abraham he puts as Abraha, David as Dāvīda, Gabriel as Gabriyet, Elizabeth as Yelīśvā, Mary as both Merī and Mariyā, Augustus Caesar as Agastasīsara, Christ as Iso and Yesu, Herod as Heroda, Judea as Yūdāya, Messiah as both Mihisa and Misiha, Nazareth as Nas-ratama, Jerusalem as Jasrela, Magdelene as Magdalanā and so on.

Only those writers can compose works in Sanskrit who have thorough knowledge of its literature. The writers of the works on Christ and Christianity, even though devout Christians, inheriting or adopting the Sanskrit tradition as they did, could not keep themselves away from it even while dealing with themes not part and parcel of it. By sheer habit sometimes they would use old words to denote new ideas. The use of the word *vaidika* in the poem under reference in the sense of a Christian priest is a case in point. An extension of this word is *Vaidikāśrama* in the sense of a Christian Seminary :

Vaṭavātūradeśīya-
vaidikāśramacoditaḥ I
karomi nūtanākhyānam
yeśusaurabhasamjñitam II¹⁰

"Impelled by the friends in the Vataavathur Seminary I compose this Kāvya, the *Sreeyesusourabham*."

It was again the force of the Sanskrit tradition that weighed with the present author to start his Kāvya on the life of Lord Christ with an invocation to goddess Sarasvatī :

yā tu saṅgītasāhityakalācaltanyarūpīṇī I
safāmādhārabhūtām tām vande vidyādhidevetām II¹¹

"I salute the goddess of learning who wields the authority over music, literature and art. She is the support of all good-natured people and poets."

It is the influence of Sanskrit tradition again that makes the author refer to the celestial Ganges in the context of Holy Mary carrying lord Christ :

talpaṁ gavadanībhadraṁ citpum̐so garbhadhārīṇī I

śā 'dhyuvāsāñjasā Merī hamisīvābhranadīṭaṭam II ¹²

"Mary who was carrying the son of god in her womb was lying in the manger as the swan lies in the celestial Ganges."

The description in the work of the regions becoming bright and gentle breeze blowing at the birth of Christ is apiece with similar descriptions which have become a type now in Sanskrit literature :

praseduḥ kṣaṇam evāśā marutaś ca sukhā vavuh I

babhūvur nirmalāś cāpaḥ kūpeṣv api saraḥsv api II ¹³

Like the other poems on Christ's life, this poem too has the *Sermon on the Mount* in brief.

Another smaller original work in Sanskrit prose on the life of Lord Christ is the *Yeṣucaritam* by J. Marcel who styles himself as Marsalācārya. The work he divides in five Adhyāyas, in beautiful, chaste Sanskrit which has a classical ring about it. The entire life of the Lord is put here succinctly in an easy and fluent style. Two small paragraphs from this will be sufficient to form an idea of its Sanskrit :

sa yadā svasmai dattam Yisāyasya pustakam udaghāṭayat tadā tatredam likhitam avartata. Tṣvaro mayy avasthitah..... viśāda vidīrṇāntaraṅgān sukhayitum, baddhānām muktim, andhānām darśanam, ca pradātum..... mām prajighāya saḥ. ¹⁴

"When he opened the book of Yisāya given to him he found it written there. The Lord is in me. He has sent me to provide happiness to the sad and to give release to the bound and sight to the blind."

paran tu bho śrotāraḥ yuṣmān idam vaktum abhyutsahe ye yuṣmabhyam druhyanti teṣām api hitam eva tanuta. yuṣmān śapanti ye tebhyo 'py āśiṣam eva datta. ye yuṣmān apavadanti teṣām api hitam prārthayadhvam. yas tava ekasmin kapole praharati tasmai kapalam anyam api pradārśaya.....yo vā ko vā bhavatu tāvako yācakah, dehi tasmai. mā abhivāñcha tatpratyādānam. kiñ ca yuṣmān prati yādṛśam ācāram abhilas-atha, tādr̥śo bhavatu yuṣmākam api itareṣv ācārah.....

"But O you the listeners, I feel like telling—Even those who are hostile to you, you do good to them too. Those who curse you, them too you bless. Those who denounce you, you pray for their welfare too. To the one who slaps you on one cheek, you show him the other one. Whosoever may ask you for something, give that to him. Don't care for any return for it. Moreover, the kind of treatment you want for yourself, meet the same to others."

The next work which is not an original composition in Sanskrit but very much looks like so is the *Mahātyāgī* of M.O. Avara. The work was originally composed in Malayalam but was translated from it into Sanskrit by K.P. Narayana Pisharoty. The work in verse meaning literally the Man of Sacrifice is a poetic reflection on the seven last words uttered by Jesus Christ from the Cross. The Malayalam original had attained great popularity and had for some three decades been the text book for examinations in the Universities of Madras, Travancore and Kerala. It was its success that had prompted the author to arrange for its Sanskrit translation. "He wanted to see the story of Christ portrayed in the great classical language of India."

The *Mahātyāgī* is a fine work of poetry in 163 stanzas. The thought in it is so serene, the language so imaginative and the versification so meticulously correct. The environments of the crucifixion of Christ have been so poetically treated here that those who read the work cannot but have their eyes moistened. The lines which portray the effect of the words "Forgive them, o Father, because they know not what they do" are the best in this work of which the following four lines bear reproduction :

kāruṇyārdramate kṣamasva bho

aparādhām kṛtam ebhirīdr̥śam I

yad ime na viduḥ svakarma vā

na ca vā tvatkaruṇām api prabho II ¹⁶

The work being a Kāvya, a poem, it affords the author ample scope for the flight of his imagination. The arms of Christ stretched on the Cross the poet

takes as indicative of the readiness on the part of Christ to embrace or as wings to soar aloft to carry all misery of mankind on his shoulders:

*nijapārśvayuge bhujadvayam
śubhadāyī praviśārayan bhavān I
kruśadāruṇi kim nu vartate
jagadāśleṣaṇabaddhakautukaḥ II
athavā naralokagām vyathām
akhiḥlām skandhatale tvam udvahan I
pravratya patatrayor dvayam
dharāṇīto dayitum kim udyataḥ ?¹⁷*

The Sanskrit expression in the poem has a classical ring about it

*mihiraḥ kiraṇair nijaiḥ śubhair
jagadandhatvam apākaroty asau I
dyutim asya mahātmanah katham
punar īkṣeta divāndhakaśikah II¹⁸*

"While the sun with its powerful rays takes away the blindness of the earth, how can owl which cannot see during daytime see the greatness of the Great Light?"

Like the poet of the *Sreeyesusourabham* the poet of the *Mahātyāgī* too Sanskritizes many foreign words by just twisting them. The classic example of this is the word *kruśa* which can be formed from the Sanskrit root *kruś*, to cry, for the English cross. The same he does with the words *paradise* which he puts in Sanskrit as *parudīśa* and *pelican* which he puts in Sanskrit as *palikka*. The idea of the Lord he expresses by the words *īśa*, *īśitā*, *īśvara* and so on. The influence of classical Sanskrit Kāvya is so penetrating on him that he adopts a non-Sanskrit word *irigāla* for charcoal used in one of them, the *Naiṣadhīyacarita* of Śrī Harṣa:

Since the approach of the Christian scholars in India, as pointed out at the very start of the present discussion, was to confront the non-Christian local people, particularly the educated ones among them,

through their own medium, the medium for which they had special adoration, to enter into them, to bring them round to their view, they took to composing such works as approximated to the old Hindu Sanskrit works in nomenclature and style. Such works are the *Kristāyana*, the *Girigītā* and the *Kristunāmasahasram* modelled as they are, as can be seen from their names on the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Viṣṇu sahasranāma* respectively. There is reported to be a *Kriṣṭopaniṣad* also composed in the typical Upaniṣadic style.

From what has been said above, it should be clear that there has grown in Sanskrit a considerable corpus of Christian literature both in original and in translation. The literature, though composed primarily to reach the Sanskrit-knowing intelligentsia to motivate it to Christianity, has a lot to commend itself even as work of art and consequently deserves wide notice not only in India but also beyond its shores.

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1. XVII 40. 2. XVII.52. 3.IV.48.4.IV.52

5. VIII.436. IV.47. IV.58. I.2.

9. I.2.10. Preliminary verses, verse 12.11. ibld., verse 1.

12. II. 38.13. II. 44.14. p. 9.15. p.13.

16. verse 7.117. verses 54-55.18. verse 94

MORAL VALUES AS ENUNCIATED IN THE VĀLMĪKI-RĀMĀYAṆA

Satya Vrat Shastri

The Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa is a saga of victory of good over evil. Apart from the lessons in morality deducible from it, it has certain express statements where they are emphasized elevating the work to the stature of a Smṛti, a text on moral principles. It has a rich storehouse of wise sayings of every day utility to common man. These sayings generally take the shape of advice, admonitions, statements of worldly wisdom, vagaries of life, the ways of the wise, etc. to suit all conceivable situations. Therein lies the utilitarian value of these sayings. One can draw inspiration from and get proper guidance from them in correct attitude to life and decent behaviour and confirm one's conviction in actions.

One of the basic points of the advice of the Rāmāyaṇa is to be active always: *bhava kriyāparo nityam*. There is no place for lethargy in it. One has to do things oneself and not leave them to fate : If one were to depend upon fate only, one is set to lose everything and has to be on the run: *kṣipram bhavati nirdravyaḥ palāyanapārāyaṇaḥ*. One has not only to act but act in time. There is no point in building a dam when the water has flown out: *gatodake setubandho na vidhiyate*. While one has to act, one should act coolly and proceed decisively when faced with a calamity, or loss of wealth or the possibility of loss of one's life:

*vyasane vārthakṛcchre vā bhaye va jīvītāntage/
vimṛśan vai svayā buddhyā dhṛtimān nāvasīdati//*

In Vālmiki's scheme of things there is no room for despair and sorrow in times of distress : *samprāpya paṇḍitaḥ kṛcchram naiva śoke nimajjati*.

Man is born on the earth not just to vegetate. There are certain ideals he has to live for and the first and the foremost of these is that one should protect oneself by all means, *ātmā rakṣyaḥ prayatmena*. If

one cannot save oneself, then everything is lost. One can reform oneself, improve oneself, educate oneself in better ways. All this one can achieve only if one were to ensure one's protection.

Another core teaching of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is to follow the righteous path, *dharma*, for, from it flows wealth, happiness, everything; the entire universe is, indeed, the essence of righteousness:

*dharmād arthaḥ prabhavate dharmāt prabhavāte sukham/
dharmaṇa labhate sarvaṁ dharmasāram idaṁ jagat//*

But then to be righteous, to be good, is not to tolerate evil that has to be put down with a heavy hand. "Words of goodwill will have no effect on demons, there can be no gifts acceptable by the wealthy, and those mad cannot be moved by threats. Punishment alone shall have its effect on the wicked:"

*na sāma rakṣassu guṇāya kalpate
na dānam artho 'paciteṣu vartate/
na bhedasādhyā baladarpitā janāḥ*

Throughout Indian tradition great emphasis has been laid on truthfulness. Declares the *Vājasaneyisaṁhitā*: *satyam eva jayate*, truth alone triumphs which has been adopted by the Govt. of India as its motto. The same text further says it is through *satya*, truth, that the path that leads to divinity opens up: *satyena panthā vitato devayānaḥ*. The *Yājñavalkyasmṛiti* includes *satya* among the ten *yamas*, the great moral and religious observances the constant practice of which is a must. The same strain has the *Rāmāyaṇa*. A stanza in it assigns to *satya*, truth, a place higher than even a thousand *Aśvamedhas*, horse sacrifices:

*Aśvamedhasahasraṁ ca satyaṁ ca tulayā dhṛtam/
Aśvamedhasahasrād dhi satyam eva viśiṣyate//*

"If a thousand *Aśvamedhas* and *satya*, truth, were to be put on the scale, *satya* would weigh heavier than the thousand *Aśvamedhas*." *Aśvamedha* is that sacrifice that is described in the scriptures as the king of sacrifices, *kraturāṭ*, and the remover of all sins, *sarvapāpaprāṇodanaḥ*. If this is the situation with one *Aśvamedha*, how much more would it be with a thousand of them? Truth is said to transcend even the thousand.

It is not surprising that the stanza should occur in the *Rāmāyaṇa* which is the story of the upholding of truth. Daśaratha had promised two boons to Kaikeyī who had asked for them at the crucial moment when he had already announced the coronation of Rāma. The boons asked for were the coronation of Bharata in place of Rāma and the exile of the latter for fourteen years to forest. Though he had promised the boons, Daśaratha did not have the heart to grant them when asked for, when face to face with Rāma. He did not say anything, *anukto 'py atrabhavān*, he just kept mum. It was Kaikeyī who conveyed to him everything. It did not take long for Rāma to get into the intricacy of the situation. He decided even without a second thought to save truth for his father; that was what Kaikeyī had also told him: *satyena mahatā rāma tārayasva nareśvaram*, and volunteered to relinquish the throne and repair to forest. His father had not told him to do anything of the kind. There was no question of disobedience to him, therefore. As a matter of fact, he had resisted all the pleading and persuasion of Lakṣmaṇa and Kausalyā; the latter even going to the extent of saying that her position as mother was superior to that of the father and that she orders him not to do anything of the kind that Kaikeyī wanted him to. Rāma knew that his father had promised two boons and that he had to keep his promise. He had to uphold the truth. Otherwise he would be untruthful. He did not want that stigma to attach to him. He had to uphold the truth, he having been described to Nārada by Vālmiki as another Dharmarāja.

Concomitant with truth is keeping one's word. The truthful ones after they undertake a vow never falsify it. To fulfill the vow is the hallmark of the great:

*nahī pratijñāṁ kurvanti vitathāṁ satyavādinaḥ/
lakṣaṇāṁ hi mahattvasya pratijñāparipālanam//*

These are the words of Lakṣmaṇa after his revival with the divine herb when he notices his elder brother sinking in sorrow for the grievous hurt suffered by him.

The scriptures clearly disapprove sleeping, studying and eating during the twilight. That was considered against the established, the good

manners, the *ācāra*. This finds evidence in the *Rāmāyaṇa* in the vows of Bharata who undertakes them to clear himself of any connivance in the exile of his elder brother. Says he, "May I court that sin as would accrue to one who sleeps during the twilight".

Sanskrit literature is full of statements where the values of sympathy, pity, mercy, and compassion are extolled in superlative terms. The classic example for all these is provided by the sage Vālmiki himself who was so moved at the pathetic sight of the bewailing of the female of the Krauñca couple sending out a cry in agony at the dropping down of the male one, bathed in blood, having been shot by a hunter while the two were in the midst of the act of love making, that he pronounced a curse on the shooter not to have any respect in society till eternity : *mā niṣāda pratiṣṭhām tvam agamah sāsvatīḥ samāḥ*. It was his grief for the bird that had flowed forth as poetry: *śokaḥ ślokatvam āgataḥ*.

When the news of the public outcry at Rāma's taking delight in the company of Sītā who had lived under the captivity of Rāvaṇa which could mean accepting their womenfolk back in their household who had stayed with other people reached the ears of Rāma, he ordered her banishment near the Āśrama of Vālmiki. It was he, the sage, who took her under his protection, arranged for her lodging in the ladies' quarters near his hermitage where she gave birth to twins. It was he who arranged for their special protection, *rakṣā*, from ghosts and goblins, the elder one with the upper part of the grass, *kuśa* and the younger one with the lower part of it, *lava*, duly sanctified with the *mantras* who thenceforth derived their names from them (the upper and lower parts of the grass, *kuśa* and *lava*). After he had composed the *Rāmāyaṇa* he taught it to them who were asked to recite it during the intervals in the course of the horse sacrifice that was in progress at Ayodhyā so that it could reach the ears of Rāma in the fulfillment of his ultimate aim of uniting Sītā with him (Rāma) which he wanted to accomplish with the strategy of turning the public opinion in favour of Sītā with the people marking the remarkable similarity in appearance of the young ones with their father. When Sītā was brought to Rāma's presence; it Vālmiki staked the fruit of his penance, *tapasyā*, that he had practised for thousands

of years:

*bahuvārṣasahasrāṇi tapaścaryā mayā kṛtā/
nopāśnīyām phalam tasyā duṣṭeyam yadi maithilī//*

This is an instance of compassion unmatched in the annals of the world : a sage volunteering to renounce all the good that could accrue to him with the hard austerities with which he had lived his life for thousands of years just for the sake of the happiness of a discarded hapless lady !

Kṣamā or forgiveness is a value to which great store is laid in Indian tradition. It is said to be an ornament of the people who choose to forgive though in as position to pay back in the same coin: *śaktānām bhūṣaṇam kṣamā*. The *Rāmāyaṇa* proclaims it to be the greatest of the gifts. According to it, it is the truth, it is sacrifice, it is a man's true glory, it is *dharma*, it sustains the whole world :

*kṣamā dānam kṣamā satyam kṣamā yajñas ca putrikāḥ/
kṣamā yaśaḥ kṣamā dharmah kṣamayādhiṣṭhitam jagat//*

Nothing, no curse, no exercise, no poison, no missiles or weapons are sharper than *kṣamā*, forgiveness.

He is considered to be real man who controls his rising anger with forbearance like a snake a worn out slough. The real knowledge consists in *kṣamā*. It is the ignorant, the unwise who fall a prey to intolerance which is the source of all troubles, all strife and all dissensions. If one were to give a chance to it, it would be a more pleasant world to live in. It provides the healing touch to frayed tempers. The knowledge needs to be tempered with it. That will be its ornament:

*narasyābharaṇam rūpam rūpasyābharaṇam guṇaḥ/
guṇasyābharaṇam jñānam jñānasyābharaṇam kṣamā//*

"A handsome figure is the ornament of a man, the ornament of a handsome figure is quality, the ornament of quality is knowledge, the ornament of knowledge is forgiveness."

Knowledge needs will power to back it. Even when realizing that one should control one's emotions, one may not actually be able to do so.

Sītā of Vālmīki seemed to be a personification of this quality. When Hanumat approached her with the news of Rāma's victory and the destruction of Rāvaṇa, he sought her permission to slay all the dreadful demonesses who had tortured her earlier with harsh words and cruel gestures. She asked him not to harm them, they having acted at the behest of their master. She forgave them for all their misdeeds: *dāsīnām rāvaṇasyāham marṣayāmi*. She is magnanimous enough to declare that one should cause no harm even to those who are cruel, who take delight in sinful act and indulge in sinful activity:

*lokahimsāvihārāṇām krūrāṇām pāpakarmaṇām/
kurvatām api pāpāni naiva kāryam aśobhanam//*

The same idea is echoed in the verse preceding the above one:

*pāpānām vā śubhānām vā vadhārhanam athāpi vā/
kāryam kāruṇyam āryeṇa na kaścīn nāparādhyati//*

“A good man should be compassionate even to those who are sinful or of good act or deserving of death. Who is there who has not committed an offence?”

To be grateful to one who has done good is a virtue the *Rāmāyaṇa* emphasizes in a number of stanzas that all figure in its Fourth Book, the context being Sugrīva's getting engrossed in sensuous pleasures on getting the throne and not engaging himself in the effort for tracing Sītā in return for Rāma eliminating his elder brother that enabled him to get it. Rāma asks Lakṣmaṇa to approach him and tell him that “he who breaks his promise made to a powerful benefactor who solicits his favour is regarded by people as vile and that “ungrateful they are who after achieving their ends engage themselves not in the service of their friends who have yet to achieve their ends. Their flesh even those who feed themselves on it, do not partake”. A wicked person is he who does not repay the good turn : *kṛtām na pratikuryād yaḥ puruṣāṇām hi dūṣakaḥ*. To repay the good turn is the eternal principle : *kṛte ca pratikartavaym eṣa dharmah sanātanaḥ*. One not doing so invites on himself utmost condemnation. There is expiation for every kind of offence, may be even the heinous one, but not for ungratefulness. Declares the *Rāmāyaṇa* in ringing tones :

*goghne caiva surāpe ca caure bhagnavrate tathā/
sarvasya niṣkṛtiḥ proktā kṛtaghne nāsti niṣkṛtiḥ//*

“There is provision for expiation for the cow-killer, the drunkard, the thief, the violator of the vow—for all these there is provision for it but not for the ungrateful.”

Among many other virtues that the *Rāmāyaṇa* dwells is the virtue of charity. In a very poetic way it says that without sowing the seed in the form of charity nothing grows:

anuptam rohate śveta! na kadācin mahāmate!

If one has got some thing in charity one should pass it on to some one else. That leads to great merit: *dattasya hi punar dāne sumahat phalam ucyate*. While giving something in charity one has to take care that one does not give insultingly nor frivolously. Anything given with insult kills the donor without doubt:

*avajñayā na dātavyam kasyacil līlayā 'pi vā/
avajñayā kṛtam hanyād dātāram nātra samśayaḥ//*

When Hanumat was flying over the ocean the mount Maināka emerged out of him in a gesture of receiving him in all adoration. The words that he uttered in assuming human form are symbolic of the great consideration with which the guests were received in ancient India, they being treated the embodiments of all deities, *atithiḥ sarvadevatāḥ* in line with the injunction *atithidevo bhava*, treat guests like deities: *atithiḥ kila pūjārhaḥ prākṛto 'pi vijānatā*. “For a knowledgeable man a guest, even an ordinary one, is deserving of adoration”.

Excess of everything is bad is a common enough saying. The same the *Rāmāyaṇa* also proclaims: *sarvatrātikṛtām bhadre vyasanāyopakalpate*, “O the good lady, excess committed in all things is the source of trouble”.

The *Rāmāyaṇa*, as can be seen from the above, presents a beautiful string of moral principles that need to be cultivated to make life purposeful and worthy of living. The stanzas enunciating them are a real treasure trove of true knowledge.

